Dear Mrs. Smith:

Your September 15, 2013 message was forwarded to me at the Environmental Protection Agency, Region 6 office (EPA Region 6) by the White House. Your message states concern regarding the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals' role in ensuring safe drinking water supply in St Bernard Parish, following the death of a boy that was exposed to the *Naegleria fowleri* ameba. You also suggest that resources should be directed toward infrastructure improvements, such that St Bernard Parish is not seen as a third world country.

As background, *Naegleria fowleri* is a heat loving, microscopic ameba. It can cause a rare and devastating infection of the brain called primary amebic meningoencephalitis (PAM). The ameba is commonly found in warm freshwater (e.g. lakes, rivers, and hot springs) and soil. *Naegleria* usually infects people when contaminated water enters the body through the nose. Once the ameba enters the nose, it travels to the brain where it causes PAM, which is usually fatal. Infection typically occurs when people go swimming or diving in warm freshwater places, like lakes and rivers, and exposure through treated drinking water is extremely rare. It is important to note that the *Naegleria fowleri* ameba is killed when exposed to disinfectants such as chlorine. It is also important to note that the St Bernard Parish public water system has been in compliance with disinfection monitoring requirements. Because recent investigation monitoring has shown nondetectable levels of chlorine in portions of the distribution system, LDHH has directed St Bernard to increase chlorine disinfection and flushing in the St Bernard Parish public water system.

Due to the severe consequence and rare occurrence of *Naegleria* in drinking water, Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (LDHH) officials contacted Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and EPA Region 6 to assist in monitoring for and eliminating the *Naegleria fowleri* ameba from the St Bernard Parish public water system. Dr. Michael Beach (CDC), Dr. Jonathan Pressman (EPA's Office of Research and Development), and I met September 23, 2013 with officials from LDHH to develop a monitoring and remediation strategy for the St Bernard Parish public water system. Based on this meeting and based on past experience in working with LDHH to address Louisiana public water system issues (e.g., Hurricane Katrina damage), I can assure you that LDHH is tapping all available resources to address the St Bernard Parish water system contamination issue. Additionally, at the request of State Senator J.P. Morell, Dr. Beach, Dr. Pressman and I joined Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals in answering public questions regarding the recent *Naegleria fowleri* contamination. The public meeting was held Monday night, September 23, to answer questions about steps being taken to disinfect and flush the St Bernard Parish public water system.

Disinfection and flushing throughout the St Bernard Parish public water system has steadily increased chlorine residual levels throughout the distribution system, but continued efforts will likely be necessary for at least another 30 days. Regarding your concern of resources being directed toward infrastructure improvement in St Bernard Parish, I am happy to report that a new water treatment plant is being constructed, using Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) disaster aid funds, and LDHH has offered low interest loans to St Bernard Parish to address water distribution system needs.

I hope this response addresses your concerns regarding the safety and quality of St Bernard Parish drinking water, and the role of LDHH in ensuring such drinking water quality. Please contact me if you have any additional questions or concerns with drinking water quality in St Bernard Parish.